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WHAT WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S RELIGION ?

By JNO. W. STARR, Jr.

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WHAT WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S RELIGION?

"WHAT was Abraham Lincoln's religion?" This question has long been a topic for discussion—nay even bitter controversy, and instead of being settled, it seems to have become more and more a subject for debate among those interested in the life of the Martyr-President.

He has been claimed by the most orthodox Christians as holding their tenets of faith, as well as by the Unitarians. Infidels, Freethinkers and Deists assert that he was one of their number, while Spiritualists contend that he looked with favor on their phenomena. Several times the query has arisen as to whether in his early life he was not a Catholic; he has been called a Universalist, a materialist and a rationalist, while some writers say that he can only be compared to the Jewish prophets of old, one author within the last few years having published a book which tends to show him a prophet inspired of God.

Probably the first attempt of any significance to determine his religious opinions was made in J. G. Holland's biography, issued in 1865, shortly after the assassination. In this Dr. Holland claimed him to have been a Christian, basing his assertion chiefly on the testimony of Newton Bateman, Superintendent of Public Instruction in Illinois at that time, who had given him a minute account of an interview held with Lincoln during the Presidential campaign of 1860. This has often been referred to as the "famous Bateman interview."

In 1870 the Toledo *Index* printed a lengthy communication from W. H. Herndon, giving an extended interpretation of what he considered had been his law partner's Freethought views. This letter has recently been reprinted in the *Truthseeker,* a New York "freethought" publication.

Two years later Ward H. Lamon's biography appeared, following the line of Herndon's reasoning as regarded Lincoln's religious belief, or rather lack of it. But as Lamon also had been a law-partner of Lincoln, as well as his Marshal at Washington during his Presidency, the general tone of his work, especially in analyzing Lincoln's character,

and more particularly the disparaging manner in which he referred to his old friend's religious views, was for a long time regarded by Lincoln lovers as inexplicable. However, comparatively recently it has been proven conclusively that this book was in reality penned by Chauncey F. Black, a son of Jeremiah S. Black, Attorney-General in Buchanan's Cabinet and a political opponent of Lincoln.

This work was extensively reviewed in all the current magazines, being severely criticised in *Scribner's*,* of which Dr. Holland was editor.

About a year later † the same magazine contained a lecture by Rev. James A. Reed on "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln," written out at the request of Dr. Holland. This lecture was printed as a reply to Herndon and Lamon.

Hon. Isaac N. Arnold's *Life of Abraham Lincoln,* wherein is given a rather extended exposition of what the author considered were the views of the great Emancipator on the topic under discussion, and in which he is made to appear as a Christian in the fullest sense of the word, was published in 1885.

Until his "Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life" appeared in 1890, Herndon wrote and lectured much on this subject, and was also engaged in several controversies. Chapter 14 of his work is an epitome of his previous expressions along that line.

"Was Lincoln a Spiritualist," by Nettie C. Maynard was issued in 1891. In this the author takes the affirmative side.

In 1893 occurred the controversy between Robert G. Ingersoll and General Charles H. T. Collis, the former maintaining that "Abraham Lincoln's religion was the religion of Voltaire and Paine," the latter denying it, and adducing evidence in support of his contention. This correspondence, with additional testimony, was published in pamphlet form in 1900 by General Collis.

John E. Remsburg's *Abraham Lincoln: Was He a Christian?*, after running serially in the *Truthseeker* was issued in book form in 1893.

* *Scribner's Monthly,* August 1872.

† *Ibid.,* July 1873.

This evidence was intelligently collected and interestingly arranged, and aside from its rather polemical tone, makes very good reading. Remsburg follows the line laid down by Herndon and Lamon.

Orrin H. Pennell of the East Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church published in 1899 a booklet of sixty pages on *The Religious Views of Abraham Lincoln,* contending that he was an orthodox Christian in every particular.

During the last few years several addresses and a few monographs dealing with the subject have appeared. All of them possess some merit, and it is understood that there are now in the course of preparation, at least three more bearing on the same theme. One of the best of the later items is undoubtedly Major William H. Lambert's *The Faith of Abraham Lincoln.*

Magazines and newspapers also have teemed with articles claiming this or that to have been his religion, and giving scores of anecdotes in support of each particular contention. One of the most interesting of the recent statements is *The Conversion of Abraham Lincoln,* by Rev. Edward L. Watson, in the *Christian Advocate* of November 11, 1909. This shows Lincoln to have been converted in good old Methodist style in 1839.

About four years ago, the writer,—a collector of Lincolniana and a student of the life of Abraham Lincoln—conceived and acted upon the idea of writing to those of Lincoln's friends then known to be living, as well as the leading collectors and biographers, whose addresses could be procured, requesting them for their views on this question. In the majority of instances, the response has been most cordial. Many and varied opinions have been expressed. Among the most interesting are the accompanying statements, which are given as a hitherto unpublished contribution to the literature of the controversy.

Probably the one who could speak with the most authority, who in all likelihood knew him better than any man then living, was Col. A. K. McClure of Philadelphia. He has written much of Abraham Lincoln in books, magazine and newspaper articles and the like, but I do not think that I have ever seen his opinions on this subject in print. The

following is from a letter received from him in 1908: "I have yours of the 8th inquiring whether I had any knowledge of Lincoln's religious belief, and especially as to his belief in the atonement. Anyone examining Lincoln's writings must be profoundly impressed with his absolute reverence for and faith in God, and I had many times heard him speak of the Overruling Power of the nation and the world, but I cannot recall a single conversation on the subject of the Atonement. I always assumed from his evident high appreciation of Christianity that he had faith in the Atonement. I never heard him utter a sentence that indicated in any way want of faith in it. If he did not cherish such faith, it is quite likely that at some time or other he would have given some expression to his doubts on the subject. While I cannot give any personal conversation as to Lincoln on the subject, I have never doubted his faith in Christianity. I do not know whether it was his purpose to join the church shortly before his death. He was a very reticent man, and I doubt whether if that had been his purpose he would have expressed it until he carried it into effect. I have seen the statements about him attending spiritualistic seances, but I do not credit them. He may have done so, but I am quite sure that he was not in any way unbalanced or affected by spiritualists."

Mr. Gibson W. Harris, who was a student in Lincoln and Herndon's law office in 1845-47, in a letter dated April 17, 1908, from Holly Hill, Florida, writes: "I do not recall a single instance during my acquaintance with Abraham Lincoln, which commenced in 1840 and lasted until 1861 * * * wherein he gave expression to his religious views. I can therefore give you only my opinion of his beliefs and unbeliefs.

He believed in a first great cause, a Creator. He did not believe in Christ as being the only Son of God; all men and women were his children. In this respect he was an Unitarian—a Universalist as far as a special place of punishment was reserved for the wicked. He was a Deist. The Chinese creed (if I may call it a creed) was his. 'God is one, religions are many; all mankind are brothers,' and he lived up to this creed. He never used profane language. He was not a member of any church or any secret order."

Another law student of Lincoln and Herndon's was Mr. Henry B. Rankin, still living in Springfield, Ill. Mr. Rankin writes, March 6,

1911: "Your letter of inquiry of February 21st was duly received. You ask, 'Do you consider Lincoln a Christian or a Deist?' Most assuredly I consider he was a Christian, as I understand Christianity—*viz.* The religion of Jesus Christ.

Again: 'Do you think he attended Spiritualistic séances? Such a "think" is absolutely absurd to me as regards Mr. Lincoln from 1850 to 1860 (the period I was near him). He was not of the cast of mind attracted by occult things, and in those years was so thoroughly absorbed with great practical themes there could have been no room for such diversions, if I may so name them.

How he grew out of, above, and beyond all environments can never be accurately traced out without recognizing the Unseen Hand that guided all. No one realized this more, or relied on it in life than Mr. Lincoln did in his own. How fully his state papers reveal this."

Mr. Horace White of New York, who reported Lincoln's speeches in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates in Illinois in 1858 and came to know him intimately, writes thus: "You ask whether I think that Abraham Lincoln was a Christian. There are so many varieties of Christians in the world that the question is a difficult one to answer. In my younger days Unitarians and Universalists were not usually classed as Christians in the community where I lived, although they went to church on Sunday and took the Bible as their principal guide. Now, however, I find that they are generally classed as Christians, although misguided ones. If you mean by the word Christian one who believes that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, born of a virgin, and that he was sent into the world to be an atonement for the sins of the inhabitants of the world by his own death on the cross, I do not believe that Abraham Lincoln was a Christian. If you mean by the word a man who takes Christ as an example of the conduct of life and sincerely takes up his cross and follows that example, I believe that he was a Christian. But I must add that he never said anything to me on the subject of religion, nor to any other persons in my presence. The opinion which I have expressed above is derived from other persons who were his near neighbors and intimate friends in Springfield, Illinois. I do not believe that Lincoln ever attended a Spiritualistic *séance* except as a matter of curiosity, as

I myself have done. I never heard him mention the subject, nor did I ever hear any intimate friend of his speak of him as inclined to a belief in Spiritualism."

The following are extracts from two letters received from Col. William O. Stoddard, now living in Madison, N. J., who was one of President Lincoln's private secretaries and has written much of him: "The question, 'Was Lincoln an Infidel,' is one which could not be asked by one who knew him as I did, nor answered by one, like my old friend Herndon, of Springfield, who absolutely did not see him or correspond with him during the last four years of his life, the years of his greatest religious thought and development. It is a question I was called to answer on the platform, before the faculty and students of Drew Theological Seminary, and they declared entire approval. What is an 'infidel'? My own theology you may imagine from the fact that I was, during many years, on the editorial staff of a leading religious journal and am an ordained Baptist deacon of the old style, leaving out the name of Calvin, of whom I am not a disciple. Now, the larger, much the larger part, of the nominal Christian world, Roman, Greek, or Protestant, would severely reject my ideas. All Bibliolators would do so. But I cannot question the vital 'Christianity' of a man who utterly believed in God; in his duty, before God, to his fellow men; in the teachings of the Scriptures; in the Christ as his example; and who could call upon the people as Lincoln did, to *join him* in prayer, in repentance for sin and in thanksgiving for Divine Mercy.

You are young, now. Grow older in a deeper and more Christ-like understanding of the words, 'Through much tribulation do ye enter into the kingdom.' For that is the way, through duties done and trials and sufferings endured, that the spiritual life of Abraham Lincoln grew up—*out of sight* of the uninspired critics who never knew him at all. I knew him.

He never had the slightest symptoms of 'Spiritism' and was the last man to put in any of his really valuable time on 'Mediums' of any sort."

Mr. Paul Selby of Chicago, a personal friend of Lincoln, and author of *Anecdotal Lincoln,* writes April 22, 1908: "Replying to

your letter of April 12th, I would state that my opinion in reference to Mr. Lincoln's religious views would be based first, on his personal character and secondly, on his utterances, especially during his career as President.

While he never adopted any sectarian creed or made a public profession of faith, there is abundant evidence that he was a close student of the Bible, was a regular attendant on religious service, and in a general way recognized the truths of Christianity. What his belief was as to the doctrine of the Atonement, I could not say. From the day of his leaving Springfield in February, 1861, to assume the duties of President (and even at an earlier date) up to his last inaugural address, he frequently gave utterance to sentiments indicating his belief in the existence of a Supreme Being and even declared 'fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away.' While opinions as to his religious faith, in the absence of any avowed creed, must remain largely conjectural, there is no doubt as to his personal integrity and unselfish patriotism.

Whatever may have been the theories which Lincoln discussed in his youth and early manhood, and which brought upon him the charge that he was an 'infidel,' I think there is no conclusive evidence that they were grounded in his character, or adhered to in his later manhood."

In a letter of April 23, 1910, Mr. Selby adds: "While Mr. Lincoln has been accorded a reputation by some writers as possessing a tendency to superstition, if he attended any *séances* conducted by Spiritualists, I think he was there merely as a curiosity seeker or investigator."

Hon. Henry A. Melvin, Asssociate Justice of the Supreme Court of California, both of whose parents were near neighbors and intimate friends of Lincoln in Springfield before the war, in an interesting letter dated June 18, 1910, writes: "My father always spoke of Mr. Lincoln as a real Christian. They often discussed religious matters, and Mr. Lincoln's attitude towards such things was very reverent. His knowledge of the Bible was considerable, and he frequently used in his speeches quotations or incidents taken from Holy Writ. I have often heard my

mother say that when he was greatly troubled by business worry, personal sorrow or domestic friction Mr. Lincoln would sit in a rocking chair, swinging back and forth, looking out of the window, and singing old-fashioned hymns. His voice was not very good and his ear for music not of the best, yet he seemed to gain much solace, my mother thought, from the old songs. Curiously enough his favorite was the old hymn containing the lines that were to be brokenly sung by many a dying soldier in the awful pen at Andersonville (I quote from memory):

> 'There I can bathe my weary soul
> In seas of heavenly rest,
> And not a wave of trouble roll
> Across this peaceful breast.'"

Mr. H. E. Barker, probably the oldest as well as one of the largest dealers in Lincolniana in the country, whose home is in Lincoln's old home town, Springfield, writes June 11, 1910: "Aside from what I have read of Lincoln's religious views, I have talked with many of his early acquaintances and am now settled in my belief, first, that in his young manhood he was skeptical, even to the point of writing an article in defence of his views which he read to a circle of friends gathered in a store here in Springfield. I made a search for this manuscript but it could not be found. It is reported that a friend thrust it into the stove and destroyed it. His law partner Herndon was of the same or greater skeptical nature, and so did not help Lincoln to the light. Later on, under grief at his children's deaths and the burden of the war, he unquestionably turned back to the teachings of his boyhood and plainly evidenced his belief in God, and showed the confidence of fellowship with him. I firmly believe that Lincoln, for at least three years before his death, was a Christian.

I am obliged to 'take stock' in the statements that he attended Spiritualistic *séances*—his nature was peculiarly suited to experiments along that line. But he never became one of them, and it is no reflection on his character that he grasped at anything that might help him. I think that Pennell's little pamphlet on 'The Religious Views of Abraham Lincoln' comes as near giving a correct estimate as anything I have seen."

In 1860 Mr. Alban Jasper Conant, now living in New York, painted Lincoln's portrait at Springfield, and during the winter of 1861-62 resided at Washington—Attorney-General Bates being his subject this time. The artist therefore had many opportunities for studying the Martyr-President. In reply to a letter of inquiry sent him, his daughter Mrs. Carrie Conant Smith, answering for her father and in his own words, writes June 2, 1910: "I attended the same church with Mr. Lincoln in Washington, sat behind him for many months; nobody was more attentive than he to the services. When he left Springfield, after his election, he asked the prayers of the people, that he might have the guidance of the Almighty in all that lay before him. He was far above the conflicting ideas of creed, and I heard him say, when he found a church that taught the teachings of Jesus Christ, he should join it."

In line with the last statement given above is one made by Major J. B. Merwin, now of Middlefield, Conn., who enjoyed the friendship of Lincoln for thirteen years, and has delivered several lectures on various phases of his career. In a short communication received in October, 1910, he informs me that he heard President Lincoln make a statement of like import to the Hon. Henry C. Deming, member of Congress from Connecticut during the Civil War. Major Merwin also vouchsafes the following information: "I knew Mr. Lincoln intimately from 1852 on to the day of his assassination—dined with him that day. He came to be one of the most profoundly Christian men I ever knew. He had no religious cant about him at all. In regard to the matter of *séances,* I think he did say that from all he could gather the spirits made his friends such consummate fools, 'that if they could rap, they would rap their skulls.' I heard and saw Mr. Lincoln pray, often. How could any one stand up under such awful burdens as he carried without Divine aid? He made no mistakes. He was divinely guided, and asked—begged—for such guidance, conscious of his own need of help beyond any human aid."

In sharp contrast to the above, is the following from Mr. C. F. Gunther, a leading collector, of Chicago: "In reply to your letter would say that in my opinion and belief I am sure that Mr. Lincoln was not a Christian. In a conversation with his son Robert some thirty years ago,

he incidentally remarked to me that some people were talking about his father's religious convictions, saying 'that his father was like many other men; he did not take any interest in church matters.' Mr. Herndon also says the same thing:

"There is no uncertainty in Mr. Lincoln's religion from the fact that he did not believe enough in the theology of the churches to identify himself with them. This is saying a good deal when a man does that in a town the size of Springfield from its infancy in this country. That is the whole truth, which is as simple and certain as any truth can be. The pressure upon the martyred president to declare himself a Christian was very great. Delegation after delegation of the clergy waited upon him to fatigue him if possible into a declaration of positive Christian belief, without success. These are the facts and ought to close the question. I believe Mr. Lincoln was what we call in modern days a Rationalist. *In certis, unitas; in dubiis, libertas:* in things certain, unity; in things doubtful, liberty."

Mr. Wayne Whipple of Philadelphia, author of *The Story Life of Lincoln,* one of the best of those books called forth by the Lincoln centenary, *The Heart of Lincoln* and other Lincolniana, has this to say, writing September 8, 1911: "About Lincoln's religious belief, I hardly know what to tell you. I do not believe that he was a 'skeptic or an infidel' as Herndon would have us believe. That was only one of the despicable things Herndon tried to say against the memory of Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Robert T. Lincoln told me once that Herndon was jealous of his great partner who had done so much for him—because Mr. Lincoln, as President, would not give him a lucrative government position. Herndon drank so much that he became irresponsible, and finally a tramp in the streets of Springfield, Illinois—after Lincoln's death.

If Lincoln was an unbeliever, many of his utterances were undeniably hypocritical—like his farewell to the people of Springfield on leaving then to become President, his letter to Eliza Gurney, the Quaker lady, the letter to widow Bixby, the Second Inaugural address, and so on. He professed a deep change in his religious life after his boy Willie died in the White House. He often prayed and asked others to pray for him—and he was a constant reader of the Bible. As to his ortho-

doxy I can't say, of course. He was confessedly superstitious, and believed in signs and 'presentiments'—he had a strange dream the night before he was shot, and talked about it in a strange way to his Cabinet that last day. He did allow a Spiritualist woman to talk with and try to comfort him after Willie's death. But his heart was right before God and he believed in prayer."

The following is from Mr. J. McCan Davis, of Springfield, now clerk of the Supreme Court of Illinois. Mr. Davis was collaborator with Miss Ida M. Tarbell in her *Early Life of Lincoln,* and has written much of him. In a letter dated May 2, 1910, he says: "I think all biographers agree that Lincoln was not an orthodox Christian. He was not a member of any church. His religious conceptions, like all else in his life, appear to have been simple and elementary. He believed in a future life and in an all-wise, beneficent. omnipotent God, as untouched by dogma or creed as the 'Great Spirit' of the untutored savage. Read his *Farewell Address* delivered here on his departure for Washington, and you will discern the breadth and depth of his religion—a religion that embraced all mankind. His farewell address is one of the classics of the English tongue—it is both a poem and a prayer. I doubt very much the stories about his attending spiritualistic *séances,* though I am not prepared to dispute them."

Another writer worthy of special mention, is Mr. Frederick Trevor Hill of New York City, author of *Lincoln the Lawyer, Lincoln's Legacy of Inspiration* and other interesting Lincolniana. Mr. Hill writes April 22, 1910: "In my opinion Abraham Lincoln was a Christian in the highest sense of the word. I think his views of Christianity were too broad to be confined to the limits of any particular creed or dogma. I am not sufficiently familiar with the tenets of the Unitarian belief to express an opinion as to whether or not his views conformed to that particular sect. I think it highly probable that he did attend one or perhaps more Spiritualistic *séances.* I think it was some time between 1855 and 1865 that there was special interest in both England and America in what is generally termed Spiritualism, and there were some very clever people then holding *séances,* and although I have not any positive evidence, one way or the other, before me, I should think the chances were that Lincoln, like a great many other men of inquiring mind, took

interest enough in the subject to attend a *séance* or two and observe what happened. That Lincoln was a Spiritualist is absurd. There is not the slightest evidence of any such thing."

The oldest collector of Lincolniana in the country is Captain O. H. Oldroyd of Washington, D. C., whose collection is in the house in which Lincoln died. Under date of October 24, 1910, Capt. Oldroyd writes: "The religious views of Abraham Lincoln have been the subject of discussion ever since his tragic death. Some have claimed him to have been a Christian, while others, with equal positiveness, declare him to have been an infidel. He surely, when a young man, read "Smith on Infidelity," which might have made him somewhat skeptical regarding the Christian religion, but his views concerning the Bible later became changed, and, in my opinion, he became a firm believer in God. His religious views differed somewhat from others, but his implicit faith in God can best be judged by his acts. He willingly subscribed to the greatest law laid down by the Master: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.'

He made frequent appeals to God in his public utterances during the great war period, especially in his address on the Gettysburg battlefield, the noblest document known to our history. Who can read his second Inaugural Address and say that Abraham Lincoln was not a Christian?"

Another large collector is Mr. Charles W. McLellan of Champlain, New York. He writes June 6, 1910: "I lived in Springfield some years and knew Mr. Lincoln as one will know everybody in a small place, and as to his religion—he attended the First Presbyterian Church—his family always. I frequently sat in the pew near theirs—if he wasn't zealously active in church work, he was regarded by everybody as being better, showing more of the Christ spirit in his intercourse and thought for others, than many who were. Whatever his views were in early years, and which you refer to as being 'hard to get at,' it is very clear and known that in the few years he was in Washington he became, through suffering, through the agony of personal affliction—through the necessity of his 'opening not his mouth' when he was 'reviled and slan-

dered,' the most religious man of the centuries. And to talk of his religious views, is to discuss the views of the Apostle Paul when he stood by and held the garments of those who stoned Stephen.

The truth as to Abraham Lincoln's religion I think is not hard to get at. I agree with John Hay who knew him better than anyone else—his remark was, I think, that 'he was the greatest man since Christ.' If he attended Spiritualistic *séances* it was because he was in such deep affliction at the loss of his son Willie, that he was willing to grasp at every straw of comfort."

Mr. Judd Stewart of Plainfield, New Jersey, is another large collector. He has also published much Lincolniana, and is well known to the devotees of the Lincoln cult. In a statement dated October 12, 1910, he writes among other interesting things: "Lincoln himself, in my opinion was an inspired implement for the use of the Supreme Being in working out the destiny of the human race: He himself perhaps only occasionally realized this, but I believe that at times he inwardly felt his power and laughed at the orthodox view of matters. When he told the delegation of ministers that if God wished him to emancipate the slaves, it was a roundabout way of telling him (Lincoln) by sending the message through Chicago, there was a nicely concealed jest at their idea of the way the Supreme Being works. When he told the Cabinet that he wanted their views upon the text of the Emancipation Proclamation, not upon its expediency, that he had promised God to issue the proclamation upon certain conditions, I think it showed his intimate contact with the Supreme Being."

Mr. D. H. Newhall of New York, formerly a collector, has also been a student, as witness the following dated April 15, 1910: "I have been more or less the last fifteen years a close student of Lincoln. It is my opinion that while he was a Christian in the common acceptation of the term, he was not a religious man, and I can find no record of his ever having definitely subscribed to any of the prevailing creeds. In other words, while not a religious man, he was not an atheist." November 4, 1910, he adds this: "You ask me to state my opinion of Lincoln's religion. Most of what has been written on this subject seems to me to

be merely special pleading, the writers trying to make Lincoln what they think he ought to be instead of weighing the evidence and judging from it alone. My own opinion is that Lincoln was an unreligious man, and that he gave little thought to religious matters. There is some evidence however, that with increasing care and responsibility came some measure of religious conviction. He may have attended spiritualistic *séances,* (so have I, perhaps you have) but I don't think there is a scrap of evidence to support Mrs. Maynard's or Fayette Hall's claim that he was a Spiritualist."

The following is from Mr. J. O. Cunningham of Urbana, Illinois, who knew Lincoln before the Civil War and has published his recollections of him. Mr. Cunningham states, November 8, 1911: "In answer to your interrogatory, 'What do you think of Abraham Lincoln's religious views—Do you believe him to have been a Christian?' I would say that from what I have heard him say in the many speeches of his delivered in my hearing, I never had a doubt but that in all of his views along religious lines, he was in full sympathy and belief with the views held by Christians the world over. From this you will readily conclude that in my hearing no word was ever dropped by him inconsistent with such views. On the contrary all his arguments along the line of opposition to slavery were drawn from the standpoint of Christianity, and without that as a basis for his conclusions his arguments would have been without foundation. I never heard him say in so many words that he believed in Christianity, but he always talked as if, in his opinion, that 'went without saying,' as the expression is often used, and needed no specific declaration.

At one time, while in attendance upon our court, and being detained here over the Sabbath, he attended religious services at the Methodist Episcopal Church, as if such was his practice. I hope I shall be understood as holding the opinion that he at all times, without so expressing himself, was a believer in Christianity, himself when the great burden of the National existence rested upon his shoulders, invoking that faith for his support."

JOHN W. STARR, JR.

MILLERSBURG, PA.

[To Mr. Starr's paper can be fittingly added an extract from the sermon of Rev. John Wesley Hill, at the (M. E.) Metropolitan Temple, New York, on February 12, 1812.—Ed.]

Providential men are priceless. Their careers are the beacons of human progress. Their thoughts and deeds are the richest legacy of mankind. They are lights kindled upon the dome of the centuries, illumining the mental and moral atmosphere of the world. History is the story of their epochal deeds, and civilization the lengthened shadow of their exalted souls. Serving most, they are the greatest. They come at great intervals, representing vast issues, founding imperishable institutions and wielding an immeasurable influence. Only about once in a hundred years does some solitary prophet stand in our midst unannounced, proclaim his message, fulfil his mission, and then vanish as mysteriously as he arrived, leaving behind a memory half mortal and half myth.

Victor Hugo says, "The summit of the human mind is the ideal to which God descends and man ascends. In each age, three or four men of genius undertake the ascent. From below, the world's eyes follow them. 'How small they are,' says the crowd." But on they go, by scarped cliff and yawning abyss, through storm and cloud and night, until they reach the summit, where they catch great secrets from the lips of God. We must look yonder, above the cloud line of history, if we would see them. Theirs is a select circle of picked personalities. There is no primacy among them. Genius is equal to itself. They are all the greatest. There is no method for striking the balance between Abraham and Moses, or Homer and Shakespeare, or Cromwell and Wellington, or Washington and Lincoln.

They were Providential men. It is not easy to recognize a prophet. They do not wear the same robe nor work in the same *rôle*. The sheepskin mantle of John the Baptist is no more necessary to a modern prophet than is the bow of Ulysses to a modern soldier. Prophets come upon different missions: one as a patriarch like Abraham; another as a lawgiver like Moses; another as a warrior like Joshua; another as a disturber and avenger like Elijah; another as a reformer like Luther;

another a regenerator like Wesley; another as a patriot like Washington; another as an emancipator and deliverer like Lincoln.

Someone has said that "A saint is a good man dead one hundred years, cannonaded then but canonized now." It was the Galilean who said, "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country." This is the history of all prophets. Stones have been their bed and bread. Lincoln was no exception to the rule. In his day he was slandered and maligned, criticised and cartooned, assailed and assassinated.

Thus it has ever been. Aristides was banished because he was known as "the Just." A monument now stands upon the spot from which Bruno started heavenward in a chariot of fire. John Bunyan penned the "Pilgrim's Progress" in a dungeon. Wellington was mobbed in the streets of London on the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. Scipio Africanus, who defeated Hannibal at Zama, was arraigned by a factious mob and condemned to death. He repelled his accusers by reminding the people that it was an anniversary of Zama, and then he was permitted to go into voluntary exile, where he died.

Yesterday we called Washington a fastidious aristocrat, and Lincoln a buffoon. To-day we set these men on Olympus with the gods and speak of them as patriots and prophets. For living prophets we have epithets; for dead ones, epitaphs. About living prophets we have opinions, about dead ones we have judgments; but they must be dead a long time—so dead as not to hear one word of praise, so dead that what we see is a specter rather than a palpitating personality. They must be dim, far away shadows, coming and going at midnight and at midday, taking up no space, disputing no ambitions, contesting no claims, awakening no resentments—so dead that we can get credit for magnanimity in the expression of deferred gratitude; so dead that where we have begrudged bread we may lavish beatitudes.

Better to recognize and honor these peerless toilers while they are in our midst than to wait until they become myths. Could Lincoln in his day have heard the faintest echo of the tumultuous applause which now greets his name, the incomparable burden which crushed his heart would have been lightened, and the solitary night through which he passed would not have been starless.

In the midst of the vituperation and abuse, the cartoons, caricatures and calumny through which Abraham Lincoln passed, he found his self-conscious rectitude the one unfailing source of comfort and support, a fortress so invulnerable that he could defy the forces of opposition which were raging about him. Seated in this secure and serene height of protection, he wrote those immortal words which are as applicable to his worthy successor now in the White House as they were to himself, "If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep on doing it to the end. If the end brings me out right, what is said against me will not amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

It is too soon to measure Lincoln's real greatness. We must stand back from the mountain if we would behold its magnitude! The workmen on the walls of St. Peter's could not see the full glory of that temple which sprang from the brain of Michael Angelo and crowned the hills of Rome. Neither can we fully appreciate the symmetry and magnificence of the great personality that has risen in our midst and blinded our eyes with the brilliancy of his achievements,—a man in whom the great qualities blended like the commingling of many streams,—patience without indolence; meekness without stupidity; courage without rashness; caution without fear; justice without vindictiveness; piety without pretension; reason without infidelity; and faith without superstition,—elements so mixed in him that great nature might stand up and say, "This is a man!" Aye, and such a man that "Taken all in all, we shall not see his like again!"

It is difficult to study providential characters in the cold light of history. The perspective is disproportioned. Washington has been transformed into marble or transfigured into myth. The fact that he never told a lie has been almost buried beneath the monstrous lies told *about* him. And so to-day a coterie of little critics are engaged in retouching the face of Mr. Lincoln,—smoothing out the seams, modifying the irregularities, painting him into artistic beauty and attempting by the deft touches of fancy to rob the world of the real Lincoln, and set up a historical phantom in his place.

Providence decreed the poverty of his early life. Born in a hovel, walled on three sides and open on the fourth to the universe, reared in penury and want; no chart except his own untutored mind; no compass except his own undisciplined will,—yet through that poverty he struggles on and on toward his destined day. That was the poverty in which the germ of manhood grows unrestrained by the demands of luxury and untainted by the poison of prodigality. It was the poverty of plain food, rough clothes and clean soil,—the poverty in which genius grows, where fortitude is developed in wrestling with the forest, and men are lifted into immortality by the "arduous greatness of things achieved." His school days were limited to a few months and his books to a few volumes; yet Providence wrought that little library into the foundation of the great character that was being fashioned. Dr. Holland says, "The poverty of his library was the wealth of his mind!" It was like a little mountain ravine through which the flood rushes with greater fury on account of its narrowness. He did not go through the University, but two or three Universities went through him. His Harvard was before the old-fashioned fireplace, where he would stretch out, from one side of the room to the other, and under the flickering light of the pine knot, read and figure and study. His writing tablet was an old pine scoop shovel, upon which he would write with a burnt stick; then scraping the shovel clean with his knife, he would fill it again,—thus literally scooping the ideas into his head. An old note book still exists in which appears one of his problems in weights and measurements properly solved; while below there appears in a boyish scrawl, an original rhyme:

"Abraham Lincoln,
His hand and pen,
He will be good,
But God knows when."

God did know when; for that boy, buried in the solitude of the wilderness, was being prepared for the day when his hand and pen would repeal the cruel edicts of a thousand years, strike the shackles from four million slaves, open the way for the march of civilization and make it possible for every man beneath that flag to be absolutely free.

His time was rapidly approaching. Already the clouds afar off

were gathering, but he saw them not. No figures were seen by him upon the dim horizon of that future in which he must play a pronounced and providential part. "The insulted flag; garments rolled in blood; the sulphurous smoke of battle; gory heaps upon desperate battlefields; an army of slowly-moving, crippled heroes; graveyards as populous as cities;" the Emancipator,—and the tragic scenes of his own martyrdom were in the cloud, though he saw them not! Through three wars we had triumphed. Our population had increased from three to thirty millions and our national domain had expanded two million square miles. Boundless in resources, rooted in a soil more generous than the valley of the Nile, environed with mountains of silver and gold, irrigated by rivers like rolling lakes and beautified with lakes like inland seas, possessed of a natural basis for the greatest continuous empire ever established by man,—orphaned of the solemn inspiration of antiquity,—yet compensated in area for all that was lost in age, the young Republic, confident and strong, towered among the nations of the earth,—the admiration and astonishment of them all.

But underneath our apparent prosperity there smoked the volcano of unrest. From the South arose the voice of woe. Slavery was sovereign of soil and soul; the auction block was red with blood; flowers festooned fetters; planters prospered by making merchandise of men; children were chattels; mothers commodities; souls were listed on the Stock Exchange, and the South feasted and fattened on unrequited toil! The Missouri Compromise had barred this monster from the North, but we were drifting in the dark, seeking to chloroform a volcano,—to arrest an earthquake by administering the opiate of compromise! Finally, stricken with dismay and seized with the wild delirium of treason, state after state seceded, the Southern Confederacy was organized, and for the first time in the history of the world, the oppressors rebelled.

And what a rebellion it was! Commanding more territory than any state in Europe save one; buttressed with impenetrable mountain fastnesses; with munitions of war the most perfect and millions of men impatient for the conflict; with leaders of confidence and renown, trained at the Nation's expense; strengthened by secret sympathy throughout the North, and encouraged by the outspoken favor of foreign cabinets and courts,—the Confederacy thus planted, equipped and officered, goaded

by greed and urged on by hatred, rejected all offers of peace, spurned all extensions of clemency, and rushing into the arena of war appealed to the arbitrament of the sword!

But instead of finding a truckling carpet knight, absorbed in braiding gold lace, the South found a man six feet and four inches tall, with serious aspect and an air of command,——the man prepared for the great emergency—Abraham Lincoln, the rail-splitter of Illinois. Confusion surrounded him. He found an empty treasury, impaired credit, a scattered army, a depleted navy; and over and against this, a rebellion the most thoroughly organized, splendidly equipped, ably directed, and terribly purposed known in the annals of war. Yet all undismayed, "with malice toward none and charity for all," holding onto God with one hand and the people with the other, he slowly stretched up to the vast undertaking, until he stood Atlas-like, with a whole world of responsibility upon his shoulders, and standing there in the wondering gaze of all nations, he toiled with such patience and wrought with such power that he demonstrated his call of God, for nowhere else could he have acquired the ability indispensable to the performance of his mission! Changing from serene to severe, from grave to gay, yet never for a moment losing sight of his one great, overmastering purpose to save the Union, he measured so precisely the public sentiment that when he advanced the public was by his side, and through four long years of want and woe and glory, he continued to advance until one redeemed and glorified flag floated over all the land!

APPENDIX

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